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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 166910

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SUBJECT: INTSUM 597 - JUNE 30, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. LEBANON. THE KILLING OF AT LEAST 22 PERSONS FROM FOUR GREEK CATHOLIC VILLAGES IN THE BEKAA EARLY WEDNESDAY HAS CONSIDERABLY HEIGHTENED TENSION IN AN ALREADY POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE ATMOSPHERE IN THE CHRISTIAN AREAS OF LEBANON. PRESIDENT SARKIS CHAIRED AN EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE CABINET, AND EARLIER TELEPHONED SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSAD TO DISCUSS THE INCIDENT. AFTER THE CABINET SESSION, PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS SAID LEBANON HAD "REACHED A CROSSROAD." THE ADF WAS PLACED ON ALERT.

2. THOSE KILLED WERE BELIEVED TO BE LARGELY PHALANGISTS, ACCORDING TO EMBASSY BEIRUT. ALTHOUGH THE IDENTITY OF THE RAIDERS IS NOT KNOWN, MANY OBSERVERS HAVE POINTED TO CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE WHICH SUGGESTS THAT RIFAAT ASSAD'S SPECIAL FORCES WERE INVOLVED. OTHERS HAVE OPINED THAT FRANJIAH'S FOLLOWERS, AIDED BY RIFAAT'S INTELLIGENCE

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APPARATUS, STRUCK THE VILLAGES AS A PRELIMINARY ROUND IN THE ELDER FRANJIAH'S EXPECTED REVENGE FOR THE PHALANGE KILLING OF HIS SON TONY. IN ANY CASE, THE EMBASSY OBSERVED, THE PROSPECTS FOR BROADER PHALANGE-SYRIAN FIGHTING HAVE INCREASED, SINCE BASHIR GEMAYEL WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY RETALIATE VIOLENTLY. (CONFIDENTIAL)

3. WEST BANK. CONVERSATIONS WITH SEVERAL WEST BANK MAYORS SUGGEST TO OUR JERUSALEM CONSULATE GENERAL THAT ISRAELI DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN HAS A DEFT TOUCH IN DEALING WITH WEST BANKERS. BOTH HEBRON'S MAYOR QAWASMAH AND RAMALLAH'S KHALAF, FOR INSTANCE, HAVE RECEIVED A VERY FAVORABLE IMPRESSION OF WEIZMAN IN THEIR PERSONAL CONTACTS WITH HIM. QAWASMAH FOUND HIM MORE FORTHCOMING IN PRIVATE THAN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS WOULD INDICATE. (CONFIDENTIAL)

4. ISRAEL. INTSUM 596 CONTAINED A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF WEIZMAN'S RECENT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. WE ARE NEVERTHELESS PRESENTING FURTHER TREATMENT OF THE SUBJECT, WHICH IS A SOMEWHAT EXPANDED AND MORE DEVELOPED ACCOUNT OF WEIZMAN'S ROLE, ESPECIALLY VIS-A-VIS BEGIN.

5. RELATIONS BETWEEN DAYAN AND WEIZMAN HAVE REACHED A NEW LOW IN RECENT DAYS, FOLLOWING WEIZMAN'S CHARGE EARLIER DURING THE DEBATE ON THE US QUESTIONS THAT DAYAN WAS LEADING THE CABINET AROUND BY THE NOSE AND HIS ALLEGATION THAT DAYAN AND BEGIN WERE LEADING THE COUNTRY TOWARD ANOTHER

WAR. ON A MORE FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL, THE PROBLEM BETWEEN THE TWO MEN DERIVES FROM LONGSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN POLICY PERSPECTIVES, THE CONTINUING COMPETITION FOR THE SUCCESSION TO BEGIN, AND INTENSIFIED PERSONAL ANTAGONISM IN THE WAKE OF WEIZMAN'S HARSH REMARKS TWO WEEKS AGO.

6. STRONG CRITICISM WITHIN HERUT OVER WEIZMAN'S ATTACK ON THE PRIME MINISTER HAS ABATED, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, DUE TO BEGIN'S APPARENT DECISION TO PAPER OVER THE RIFT.
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THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT BEGIN IS VERY UNHAPPY WITH WEIZMAN, BECAUSE OF THE LATTER'S FREQUENT DISPLAYS OF DISSATISFACTION WITH BEGIN'S POLICY AND HIS IMPLICIT QUESTIONING OF BEGIN'S LEADERSHIP. BEGIN'S ANTAGONISM IS AGGRAVATED BY HIS PERCEPTION THAT WEIZMAN IS A POTENTIAL CHALLENGER.

7. WEIZMAN'S BEHAVIOR IS UNUSUAL IN ISRAELI POLITICS. THOUGH TRADITIONALLY FREE-WHEELING AND OUTSPOKEN, ISRAELI MINISTERS HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT OPENLY TO CONFRONT A PRIME MINISTER, ESPECIALLY OVER SENSITIVE FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. ISRAELI COMMENTATORS HAVE BEGUN TO COMPARE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE PRINCIPAL LIKUD MINISTERS UNFAVORABLY WITH THAT OF THE RABIN-PERES-ALLON TRIUMVIRATE.

8. BEGIN'S DECISION TO DAMPEN THE DISPUTE IN THE CABINET, RATHER THAN REMOVE OR DISCIPLINE WEIZMAN, IS OUT OF CHARACTER. BEGIN'S RESTRAINT IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE FAVORABLE OPINION OF WEIZMAN HELD BY SADAT AND MANY IN THE US, AND THE DESIRE NOT TO SEND A NEGATIVE SIGNAL WHICH COULD DISRUPT THE PEACE PROCESS; AND WEIZMAN'S POPULARITY IN ISRAEL AND THE CONCERN THAT DISMISSING HIM COULD PROVOKE A MAJOR POLITICAL CRISIS.

9. THE INTERNAL POLITICAL FACTOR HAS RECEIVED INCREASING ATTENTION IN RECENT DAYS. PRESS REPORTS SUGGEST THAT THE NRP WARNED BEGIN AGAINST DISMISSING WEIZMAN. NRP LEADERS ALLEGEDLY THREATENED TO WITHDRAW FROM THE COALITION IF WEIZMAN WERE REMOVED. WHILE SOMEWHAT OVERSTATED, THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE ACCOUNTS MIGHT BE CORRECT. IT IS IN LINE WITH OTHER HINTS OF INTENSE ACTIVITY BY THE NRP TO PREVENT A RUPTURE OF THE COALITION AND BREAKDOWN OF THE PEACE PROCESS.

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10. SIGNS OF A NEW MODERATION AND ACTIVISM BY NRP MINISTER HAMMER ABOUND. HE IS THE PARTY'S MOST ASTUTE POLITICIAN AND ITS MOST IMPORTANT FIGURE. WHILE THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT HAMMER HAS ALTERED HIS LONGSTANDING OPPOSITION TO

TERRITORIAL RETROCESSIONS IN THE WEST BANK, THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT HE WOULD DEFER--INDEFINITELY IF NECESSARY --THE EXTENSION OF ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY TO THIS AREA. HAMMER HAS STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF PEACE IN RECENT MONTHS, IN CONTRAST TO HIS TRADITIONAL EMPHASIS ON ISRAEL'S RELIGIO-HISTORICAL TIES WITH THE WEST BANK.

11. THE LIBERAL MINISTERS ALSO HAVE PLAYED A MEDIATORY ROLE BETWEEN BEGIN AND DAYAN, ON THE ONE HAND, AND WEIZMAN, ON THE OTHER. WHILE EHRLICH AND HIS COLLEAGUES SUPPORT BEGIN ON MATTERS HE REGARDS AS IMPORTANT, EVEN WHEN THEY MIGHT DOUBT THE WISDOM OF A PARTICULAR ACTION, THEY HAVE ALSO SUPPORTED WEIZMAN'S RIGHT TO DISAGREE AND TO STRUGGLE AGAINST BEGIN'S POSITIONS. THE LIBERALS ALSO CONTINUE TO ACT AS A COUNTERWEIGHT AGAINST SHARON AND OTHER EXTREMIST ELEMENTS IN HERUT.

12. IN THIS ATMOSPHERE, THE ISRAELI PRESS IS RIFE WITH SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE COALITION CRISES AND "NEW POLITICAL DEPLOYMENTS." WHILE THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF DISCONTENT WITH BEGIN WITHIN THE COALITION AND CONTINUING CONTACTS BETWEEN COALITION MEMBERS AND THE OPPOSITION, THE

EFFERVESCENCE WITHIN THE MEDIA IS NOT MATCHED BY THE SAME DEGREE OF FERMENT WITHIN THE COALITION. THERE IS NO CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE THAT BEGIN CANNOT CONTAIN THESE POLITICAL FLUIDITIES, ASSUMING THAT HIS HEALTH HOLDS UP. THE COALITION PARTNERS HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN THE PERPETUATION OF THE STATUS QUO AND ARE DISINCLINED TO TAKE THE POLITICAL RISKS INHERENT IN A COALITION BREAKDOWN.
(CONFIDENTIAL) VANCE

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